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The Fairies and the Realms of the Dead

by K. M. BRIGGS

*Presidential Address delivered before the Society at the
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AT first sight the commonly received idea of Fairyland seems as far as possible from the shadowy and bloodless Realms of the Dead, and yet, in studying fairy-lore and ghost-lore alike we are haunted and teased by resemblances between them. This is not to say that the Fairies and the Dead are identical, or that the fairies derive entirely from notions about the dead, only that there are many interconnections between them, and that some classes of the dead were undoubtedly regarded by the old people as inhabitants of Fairyland.

One of our earliest pair of fairies, the Green Children, described by Ralph of Coggeshall and William of Newbridge, seem far from being ghosts, yet the land they came from, St Martin's Land, bears some resemblance to a country of the dead. It was an underground land, without sun or moon, but always in a kind of twilight, and access to it was by a cave. It is to be noticed, too, that the habitual food of the children was beans, the food of the dead.

There is some suggestion of a connection here, but the medieval example of a full fusing of Fairyland with the Realm of the Dead is the delightful 14th century poem of 'King Orfeo'. The influence here is Celtic, for it is a translation of a Breton Lai.

Here the two conceptions of Hades and Fairyland are inextricably interwoven. Orfeo and Queen Meroudys — or Heurodys as she is in some manuscripts, are a fairy-tale King and Queen. Like Guinevere Queen Meroudys went a-Maying one May-Day, and like Sir Lancelot she fell asleep under an ympe tree. An ympe tree is a grafted apple tree and is full of magical influences. Guinevere, Lancelot and Meroudys were all carried off. The month of May, although it is a time of fertility rites, is also traditionally a time of

danger, and it has been suggested that Sir Meliagrance, the son of King Bagdemagus, was a king of the Underworld. If this were so it would bring Guinevere and Meroudys into some connection. At least the beginning of the adventure is something the same.

It be-felle in the begynning of May,
When ffoules sing on every spreȝ,
And blossom spryng on every bouzhe,
Over all wexyȝ mery i-nowhe;
Than the quene dame Meroudys
Toke with hyr ladés off grete price,
And went in an underon-tyde
To pley hyre in an horcherd syde.¹

So of Meroudys. Of Guinevere, after a charming little chapter on how the lover flourisheth his heart in May, we have:

So it be fell in the month of May, Queen Guenever called unto her knights of the Table Round; and she gave them warning that early upon the morrow she would ride a-Maying into woods and fields beside Westminster. And I warn you that there be none of you but that he be well horsed, and that ye be all clothed in green, outhur in silk outhur in cloth; and I shall bring with me ten ladies, and every knight shall have a lady behind him, and every knight shall have a squire and two yeomen; and I will that ye be well horsed. So they made them ready in the freshest manner.²

Guinevere was carried off at once, but Meroudys had first a warning dream, from which she woke distraught, tearing herself for grief. When she had been carried into the Palace and a little comforted she told King Orfeo her vision. It was of the Fairy Rade.

'As I went this undyre-tyde,
To pley me by myn orcherd syde,
I fell on slepe all be-dene,
Under an ympe upon the grene;
My maydens durst me not wake,
Bot let me lyze and slepe take,
Tyll that the time over-passyd so,
That the undryne was over-go.
When I gan my-selve awake,

¹ W. C. Hazlitt, *Fairy Mythology*, pp. 87-8.

² Malory, Bk. XIX, cap. 1.

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Ruly chere I gan to make,
 Fore I saw a ssembly syzt;
 To-werd me come a gentyll knyzt,
 Wele armyd at all ryzht,
 And bad I schuld upon hyzeng,
 Come speke with hys lord the kyng.
 I ansuerd hym with wordes bold;
 I seyde, I durst not ne not I wold.
 The knyght azen he rode full fast,
 Than come ther kyng at the last,
 With an hundreth knyghtes also,
 And a hundreth lades and mo,
 All they rydan on whyte stedes,
 Off milke whyte was all ther wedes,
 I saw never, seth I was borne,
 So feyre creatours here be-forne.
 The kyng had a croune on hys hede,
 It was no sylver ne gold rede,
 It was all off presyous stone,
 Als bryzt as any son itschone!
 Also sone as he to me come,
 Whether I wold ore not, up he me name,
 And mad me with hym forto ryde
 Upon a stede by hys syde;
 He brovzt me to a feyre palas,
 Wele tyred and rychly in all case;
 He shewed his castellus and toures,
 And hys hey haules and boures,
 Forestes, ryvers, frutes and floures;
 Hys grete stedes shewyd me ichone,
 And sethyn he made me azene to gone
 Into the sted where he me fette,
 In that same sted there he me sete,
 And seyde, 'Madame, loke that thou be
 To-morrow here under this tre,
 And than schall thou with us go,
 And lyve with us ever-more so;
 Iff that thou make us any lete,
 Where-ever thou be, thou schall be fette
 And to-torne thi lymys all,
 No-thinge helpe the ne schall!
 And thoz thou be all to-torne,
 zit shall thou a-wey with us to be borne!'

The country here shown by the King is a beautiful fairyland, but the King's threats are grim and inexorable, worthy of the King of Hades.

The passage that follows reminds one strongly of the Irish fairy legend of Midir and Etain. You will remember that Etain in her fairy state had been the bride of the fairy king Midir, but had been bewitched into the form of a gnat by a jealous rival and swept away into the mortal world by an irresistible wind. Here she was accidentally swallowed by a woman and born again as a beautiful girl, who married King Eochaid. Midir long sought for her, and when he at last found her, he appeared as a stranger in King Eochaid's court, and won his wife from him at a game of chess. When King Eochaid realised what he had done, he took Etain to the innermost room of his palace and surrounded the place with all his army; but Midir suddenly appeared in their midst, and he and Etain flew away from the palace as a pair of swans.

In the same way King Orfeo took Meroudys to the ympe tree, as she had been commanded, but surrounded it with all his forces to save her from the Fairy King. But suddenly she vanished from amongst them, and no one knew where she had gone.

King Orfeo, after mourning her in the Palace, called his nobles together and left his realm in the care of his High Steward while he went into the wilderness to lament for his queen. He was ten years there, suffering great hardship, until no one could have known him for fair King Orfeo; and then one day he took his harp and played till all the birds and beasts came round, tamed by his music. It seemed even to have called up the fairies, for suddenly the Fairy Rade came by him, and he saw them dancing and revelling, and a little after them came a bevy of fairy ladies hawking, and amongst them was Queen Meroudys, and she recognised King Orfeo, but had no power to speak to him, and, when the fairies saw that they knew each other, they hurried her away. But King Orfeo followed them until he came to the gates of Fairyland. From outside it looked as beautiful as it had to Queen Meroudys, but when Orfeo had knocked and been admitted as a harper, he saw grim things that had been hidden from her.

Than lokyd he a-boute the walle,
And saw it stond over alle
With men that wer thyder brouzt,

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And semyd dede and wer nouzht;
Some ther stod with-outyne hede,
And som armys non hade,
And some ther bodés had wounde,
And some one hors ther armys sette,
And some were strangyld at ther mete,
And men that were nomene with them ete;
So he saw them standing ther.
Then saw he men and women in fere,
As thei slepyd ther undryne tyde,
He them saw on every syde;
Among them he saw hys wyve,
That he lovyd as hys lyve,
That ley ther under that tre full trew,
Be hyre clothys he hyre knew.

All these people whom Orfeo saw were those whose lives had been cut short before their due time, and those who had put themselves in danger of the fairies by sleeping outside in the twilight. The same belief was held in Scotland in the sixteenth century, as is shown in some of the reports of the witch trials. It seems that Meroudys must have been cast again into an enchanted sleep after she had seen her husband.

Except for this grisly company of dead men, the palace was as beautiful as the country in which it stood. The king and queen sat under a royal canopy feasting, attended by a hundred knights. Orfeo, in his character as a travelling harper, fell on his knees before the king, who greeted him in a speech which might well be made by the King of Hades.

Then seyde the King, 'What art thou
That hether arte i-come now?
I, no none that is with me,
Never yet sent after the;
Never seth that my reyne began,
Fond I never none so herdy man,
That hyder durst to us wend,
Bot iff I wold after hym send.'

In reply, Orfeo pleads the minstrel's right of free passage.

'Syre,' he seyde, 'I trow wele
I ame bot a pore mynstrelle,

And zit it ys the maner of us,
 Forto seke to gret lordes hous;
 And thoz we not welcome be,
 zit we behovyth to profere oure gle.'
 Be-fore the Kyng he sette hym done,
 And toke hys herpe schyll of sowne,
 And temperd yt as he wele can;
 A blyssed-ful note he began.
 The Kyng he sate wele styll,
 To here hys herpe with ryzt gode wyll;
 Wele hym lyked to here hys gle,
 The ryche quene so deyde sche.
 Men that in the castell wer
 Come hys herpe for to here,
 And felle downne to hys fete,
 They thouzt hys herpe was so suete!
 And when the stynt of hys herpyng,
 To hym than seyde the ryche Kyng,
 'Mynstrelle, me lykes wele thi gle,
 And what thou wyll aske of me,
 Largely I wyll thee pay:
 Speke now, and thou may a-sey.'
 'Now, lord, I pray the,
 That thou wold ziff to me
 That feyre lady bryzt off ble,
 That lyzet under this impe tre.'
 'Nay.' he seyde, 'that thouzt I never,
 A foule coupull of you it were,
 Fore thou arte rowze and black,
 And sche is with-outyne lake;
 A foule thyng it were fore-thy,
 To se hyre go in thy company.'
 'Lord,' he seyde, 'thou ryche kyng,
 zit it were a fouler thyng
 To here a lesyng of thy mouthe,
 That thou me seyst nowze,
 That I schuld have what I wold,
 Bot nedys a kyng word mot hold.'
 The ryche kyng spake wordes than,
 And seyde, 'Thow arte a trew man,
 There-fore I grante that it be so,
 Thou take hyre by the hond and go;
 I wyll that thou be of hyre blyth.'

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He thankyd hym a hundreth sythe.
He toke hyre by the hond anone,
And fast went forth oute of that wone;
Fast thei hyed out of that palas,
And went ther wey thorow Godes grace.

No tragedy followed that departure, as in the Greek legend. Orfeo took his wife safely back to Thracyens. His ten years of hardship had changed him almost out of knowledge, but his steward recognised him, and rendered him back his kingdom, and Orfeo and Meroudys reigned there happily.

This is a fairy-tale, and the King of Hades is also a King of Fairyland, but it is strange how near this conception is to that to be found in many of the modern Celtic tales. But before we come to the later fairy traditions we must very briefly consider the 'Romance of Thomas and the Fairy Queen', written about a hundred years later than 'King Orfeo'. I say 'very briefly' because we shall have an opportunity next month of hearing much more about Thomas of Ercildoune. The Romance is not of quite the same poetic quality as the Ballad of 'Thomas the Rhymer', but it has a great many points of interest for the subject which we are now studying. Thomas met the lady under an elder tree, traditionally a fairy tree. The Queen was of unearthly beauty when he met her, but when he had had intercourse with her she changed for a time to a loathly hag; her eyes sank in her head, her skin shrivelled and turned leaden in colour; in fact, she assumed the likeness of a decaying corpse. After a time, however, her beauty returned to her. She took Thomas by an underground way, wading through subterranean waters. In one version of the Ballad it is said that this stream ran with all the blood that was shed upon middle earth, but this is not mentioned in the Romance. They come to a garden full of fruits, and Thomas is eager to taste them, but the Fairy Queen warns him that if he does he is lost for ever. Then she makes him put his head on her lap and shows him five paths, to Heaven, to Paradise, to Purgatory, to Hell, and the fifth, by which they are to go, to Fairyland. She warns him against speaking to anyone but herself, and presents him to the King. It is not clear whether this is a real taboo, or if it is a precaution against the King learning that she has played him false. Thomas stays in Elfland seven years, though to him it seems only three nights. At the end of the seven

years the Queen takes him back, because the fairies pay a teind to Hell every seven years, and she fears that he will be the one chosen. She gives him the gift of prophecy before leaving him, and the rest of the Romance is taken up with prophecies which were topical in their day, but are not always intelligible to the modern reader.

The True Thomas legend belongs to the Lowlands of Scotland, and many of the beliefs shown in it persisted in the Lowland tradition until the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Fairy Rade was commonly described there. We get it in the sixteenth century 'Flouting of Polwart', in the ballads of 'Alison Gross' and 'Tamlane', in a pretty description of Cromek's of a nineteenth century, and perhaps late eighteenth century, Rade. Here the fairies and their horses are small, but the horses are still white, and the fairies still beautiful, unlike the straggling and uncouth ride of the last fairies in Hugh Miller's description of the departure of the People of Peace. The Scottish witch trials supply us with plenty of evidence that the Lowland fairies still inhabited the hollow hills, and also that they were closely associated with the Dead. Alison Peirson, tried for witchcraft in 1588, said that in her visits to Elfland she met the spirits of young Maitland of Lethington, old Buccleugh and many others, including some of her own relations; Bessie Dunlop's fairy familiar was Thomas Reid, who had been killed at the Battle of Pinkie. A 'black man' who met a Lochaber crofter, called himself 'a fairy man', but said that he was one 'John Stewart, who had been slain at the down-going of the sun, and was therefore neither dead nor living'. Here we have the same belief in the Highlands as in the Lowlands. And in the Highlands, too, we have Scott's story of the Tacksman of Auchriachan, who lost his way in the mist, and strayed into a fairy dwelling, where he was warned and hidden by an old neighbour of his whose funeral he had attended some years before.

In the North of England we have fairy hills again; like Willy Howe, out of which the fairies darted to chase anyone who was so rash as to challenge them, and the fairy hill from which the Queen would give a white healing powder to those who came and asked for it. This again was evidence given in a witch trial, recorded by Webster, but here, you will be glad to know, the suspect was more mercifully treated than he would have been in Scotland. There

was also the fairy hill from whence the goblet was stolen in William of Newbridge's story.

In the Midlands we do not hear so much of the fairy hills. Aubrey tells of a shepherd who lost his way at night and went into the fairy hill of Hackpen in Wiltshire, and was brought into strange places underground where he heard musical instruments, viols and lutes.³ In the Midlands of England the connections between the fairies and the dead seem less obvious; in the North and the South-West, in Scotland and Wales and Ireland, indeed wherever the Celtic influence is obvious, they are very strong. In the North of England, which is not Celtic but may well have a number of Scandinavian survivals, many of the Brownies, like the Cauld Lad of Hilton and the Silkie of Heddon Hall, are frankly called ghosts, yet they do Brownie's work. In the South-West again we have the same strain. In Somerset the little white moths that flit about in the twilight are called Piskies and are said to be the souls of unbaptised children. Piskies often do household tasks like the Brownies, and, like them, are laid by a gift of clothing. The Fairy Market on Blackdown, described from time to time from the seventeenth down to the beginning of this century, might very well be an assemblage of ghosts. It is much like some entries into the past that have been experienced on rare occasions by people with super-sensory perception. In Wales the connection with the dead is even more explicit, and Gwynn ap Nudd, the King of the Fairies is also the King of the Dead.

The strongest and most explicit connection between the Fairies and the Dead in England is in Cornwall. That strange and interesting story, 'Cherry of Zennor', is full of suggestions that it was a land of the dead that Cherry visited. She was led by deep hidden ways and through a stream, as Thomas of Ercildoune was, and came at last to a place where flowers of all seasons bloomed together, as they do in Paradise, and where there was a sinister room with statues or dead people about it. Cherry's Master, Robin, was by nature tiny, and when she had the magic ointment in her eyes she could see him so, when he was invisible to ordinary sight, and saw the garden swarming with tiny people, and strange happenings in the enchanted room. There are two other variants of this tale, substantially the same, though 'Cherry of Zennor' is the most vivid

³ Hypomnemata Antiquaria A. MS note, p. 257 (Bodleian Manuscript).

and circumstantial, and there is another group of tales that is even more explicit. The best of these is 'The Fairy Dwelling on Selena Moor', to be found in Bottrell's *Traditions and Hearthside Stories*. It is so important in this connection that I must recapitulate it in some detail.

Mr Noy was a well-liked young farmer who lived on the edge of Selena Moor. He was a bachelor, for he had been engaged to a neighbour's girl, Grace Hutchens, who had died suddenly some years before, and no one had taken her place in his heart. He rode out one evening to the inn to order beer for the Harvest Home next day. He never returned that night, and they searched three days for him before they found him. Then, as they went through the bogland not far from his house, they heard dogs howling, and, making towards the sound, they came on a ruined bowje, or barn, and saw Mr Noy's horse tethered to a thorn, with the two dogs beside it. The horse was well fed, for it had grazed on the rich grass there, but the dogs were very thin. They went into the bowje and found Mr Noy asleep there. They roused him with difficulty. At first he seemed dazed but at last he told them what had happened to him.

On the way back from the inn he had taken a short cut and lost his way in the twilight, and wandered for some time on the treacherous bogland until he saw lights ahead of him and heard a sound of distant music. He thought they must be holding their Harvest Home at some neighbouring farm, and went towards it. He came through a beautiful orchard, with all kinds of fruit growing in it, and in sight of a fine house, where they did indeed seem to be holding festivities, for there were hundreds of tables on the green in front of the house with richly dressed people at them or dancing about round them. As he got nearer he noticed that they were very small, and their tables and dishes were small too. There was a girl, taller than the rest, standing quite near him, playing a tambourine. Presently she gave it to a little fellow near her, and went into the house to fetch out a big blackjack of beer. Mr Noy would have liked to join in the dancing, which was the liveliest he had ever seen, and he would have been glad of a drink too, but just as he was going to step forward, the girl caught his eye and signed to him to keep back. She poured out the drink and came back to him, and signed to him to follow her into the orchard. There, in the quiet, and away from the dazzle of the lights, he

recognised her as Grace Hutchens, whom he had mourned for three years. 'Thank the stars, dear William,' she said, 'that I was on the look out to stop ye, or ye would have been changed into the Small People's state; as I am, alas!'

He would have taken her in his arms, but she earnestly cautioned him against touching her and against eating any of the fruit in that enchanted orchard. She told him that the lives of the Small People seemed hollow and a sham, for they could feel nothing, but only dimly remembered what once they had felt, perhaps a thousand years ago, for these were the old heathen who lived before Christianity came into the land, and when they died they were not bad enough for the worst place and had no hope of Heaven, so they lingered on, dwindling in size, until in the end they ceased from the state in which they were.

'Strange to say it was from love of you that I came here,' she said. 'I had been milking my cows and was coming home, when I heard you hallooing to your dogs, and I tried to make a short cut to come to you, but I lost my way in the fern, which grew as high as my head, and came out in this place; and it seemed I was pixy-led, for I wandered round and round in this orchard, and at last was so hungry and thirsty that I picked one of the delicious-looking plums that was growing near. But it dissolved like bitter water in my mouth, and I fell down, senseless. When I awoke all the small people were round me, laughing and rejoicing that they had a neat girl to look after their mortal babies, which did not flourish, they said, as they used to do in the old times.'

He asked if any fairy babies were born among them, and Grace said that very occasionally there was a birth, and that then every fairy man, however old and wizened, was proud to be thought its father. She explained that they did not live together like husbands and wives, they thought that too hard considering the long ages they had before them, and they were not Christians but star-worshippers. She said that she was a little more contented than she had been since she had learned how to change herself into a bird and fly about near him, but that every time that she made this change she came back a little smaller than before, and so she was gradually dwindling as the Small People did. Here she was called away by squeaky little voices, and Mr Noy followed her to the edge of the orchard, and, looking at the little people, he saw many who had a

family likeness to people he knew, and thought that some might be recent changelings, and others their forefathers, who had died in ancient days before Christianity came to the land. He tried to think of a way in which he could free Grace from her enchantment, and remembered that turning a garment was said to be potent against fairies, so he took a pair of hedging gloves out of his pocket, turned them inside out, and threw them into the midst of the company. At once the lights went out and they all vanished, Grace with the rest. Then he felt something like a blow on his head and became unconscious, and so lay till his friends found him. Like most who have visited Fairyland, Mr Noy pined and took little interest in life after this adventure.

The Irish accounts of similar experiences are more colourful than this, but show the same groundwork of belief. This seems particularly strong in the Western Islands, according to Lady Wilde's account. A good example is 'November Eve'.⁴ All Hallows Eve is thought by the Islanders to be a very dangerous time to be out of doors, for then the dead and the fairies hold festival together.

There was a man of the village who stayed out late one November Eve fishing, and never thought of the fairies until he saw a great number of dancing lights, and a crowd of people hurrying past with baskets and bags, and all laughing and singing and making merry as they went along.

'You are a merry set,' he said, 'where are ye all going to?'

'We are going to the fair,' said a little old man with a cocked hat and a gold band round it. 'Come with us, Hugh King, and you will have the finest food and the finest drink you ever set eyes upon.'

'And just carry this basket for me,' said a little red-haired woman.

So Hugh took it, and went with them till they came to the fair, which was filled with a crowd of people he had never seen on the island in all his days. And they danced and laughed and drank red wine from little cups. And there were pipers, and harpers, and little cobblers mending shoes, and all the most beautiful things in the world to eat and drink, just as if they were in a king's palace. But the basket was very heavy, and Hugh longed to drop it, that he might go and dance with a little beauty with long yellow hair, that was laughing up close to his face.

'Well, here put down the basket,' said the red-haired woman, 'for you are quite tired, I see;' and she took it and opened the cover, and out came a little old man, the ugliest, most misshapen little imp that could be imagined.

'Ah, thank ye, Hugh,' said the imp, quite politely; 'you have carried

⁴ *Ancient Legends of Ireland*, I, pp. 145-8.

me very nicely; for I am weak on the limbs — indeed I have nothing to speak of in the way of legs; but I'll pay you well, my fine fellow; hold out your two hands,' and the little imp poured down gold and gold and gold into them, bright golden guineas. 'Now go,' said he, 'and drink my health, and make yourself quite pleasant, and don't be afraid of anything you see and hear.'

So they all left him, except the man with the cocked hat and the red sash round his waist.

'Wait here now a bit,' says he, 'for Finvarra, the king is coming, and his wife, to see the fair.'

As he spoke the sound of a horn was heard, and up dove a coach and four white horses, and out of it stepped a grand, grave gentleman, all in black and a beautiful lady with a silver veil over her face.

'Here is Finvarra himself and the queen,' said the little old man; but Hugh was ready to die of fright when Finvarra asked —

'What brought this man here?'

And the king frowned and looked so black that Hugh nearly fell to the ground with fear. Then they all laughed, and laughed so loud that everything seemed shaking and tumbling down with the laughter. And the dancers came up, and they all danced round Hugh, and tried to take his hands and make him dance with them.

'Do you know who these people are; and the men and women who are dancing round you?' asked the old man. 'Look well, have you ever seen them before?'

And when Hugh looked he saw a girl that had died the year before, then another and another of his friends that he knew had died long ago; and then he saw that all the dancers, men, women, and girls, were the dead, in their long, white shrouds. And he tried to escape from them, but could not, for they coiled round him, and danced and laughed and seized his arms, and tried to draw him into the dance, and their laugh seemed to pierce through his brain and kill him. And he fell down before them there, like one faint from sleep, and knew no more till he found himself next morning lying within the old stone circle by the fairy rath on the hill. Still it was all true that he had been with the fairies; no one could deny it, for his arms were all black with the touch of the hands of the dead, the time they tried to draw him into the dance; but not one bit of all the red gold, which the little imp had given him, could he find in his pocket. Not one single golden piece; it was all gone for evermore.

And Hugh went sadly to his home, for now he knew that the spirits had mocked him and punished him, because he troubled their revels on November Eve — that one night of all the year when the dead can leave their graves and dance in the moonlight on the hill, and mortals should stay at home and never dare look on them.

Hugh King at least got home safe and alive, and he was fortunate to do so. The same adventure, but with fatal consequences befell a woman of the islands.

One November night a woman of Shark Island, coming home late at the hour of the dead, grew tired and sat down to rest, when presently a young man came up and talked to her.

'Wait a bit,' he said, 'and you will see the most beautiful dancing you ever looked on there by the side of the hill.'

And she looked at him steadily. He was very pale, and seemed sad.

'Why are you so sad?' she asked, 'and as pale as if you were dead?'

'Look well at me,' he answered. 'Do you not know me?'

'Yes, I know you now,' she said. 'You are young Brien that was drowned last year when out fishing. What are you here for?'

'Look,' he said, 'at the side of the hill and you will see why I am here.'

And she looked, and saw a great company dancing to sweet music; and amongst them were all the dead who had died as long as she could remember — men, women and children, all in white, and their faces were as pale as the moonlight.

'Now,' said the young man, 'run for your life; for if once the fairies bring you into the dance you will never be able to leave them any more.'

But while they were talking, the fairies came up and danced round her in a circle, joining their hands. And she fell to the ground in a faint, and knew no more till she woke up in the morning in her own bed at home. And they all saw that her face was as pale as the dead, and they knew she had got the fairy-stroke. So the herb doctor was sent for, and every measure tried to save her, but without avail, for just as the moon rose that night, soft low music was heard round the house, and when they looked at the woman she was dead.⁵

In the first of these tales it is clear that the fairies are not believed to be the dead, though in close fellowship with them, for it is only on special seasons that the fairies and the dead come together. In the second they are more closely identified. In a third story from the same district the fairies seem more akin to devils, something like the fairies that St Collen defeated, but in this tale the danger of eating fairy food is emphasised.

I have given these few stories in some detail because of the many motifs they have in common, in spite of differences in time and place. A recurrent motif is the danger of eating fairy food, or rather, strictly speaking, food in Fairyland, for in many tales it is

⁵ Ibid. I, pp. 149-50.

lucky to accept fairy food outside Fairyland. It may be that the homely little fairies that give such food are not thought of as the Dead, for there is little doubt that to accept the food of the dead is dangerous. You will all remember that Persephone was doomed to stay six months in every year in the Underworld because she had eaten six Pomegranate seeds there.

We do not know whether Meroudys had eaten or not, — perhaps her tranced sleep had saved her, — but Thomas of Ercildoune was warned against eating fairy fruit, as William Noy was five centuries later. An interesting example of this belief in Ireland is to be found in another of Lady Wilde's stories about a young man who had been found dead under a hay-stack on May-Eve and was therefore supposed to have been carried off by the fairies. A renowned fairy-doctor was sent for, who promised to get him back in nine days. In the meantime he advised his family to leave food outside the fairy moat, so that the young man should not be forced by hunger to eat fairy food, and thus be under the fairy power for ever. You remember that Mallekin, who hoped to be freed from Fairyland took mortal food that was left out for her. This might account for the Brownies' readiness to eat human food. It was the other way round with Ralph of Coggeshall's Green Children; they lost their green colour and became mortal people after they had eaten mortal food.

The dangerous hours and seasons are also recurrent motifs; twilight, Halloween, Beltane, Wednesdays, Fridays, these are all times of danger. Again, in all but one of the stories we have connection, but not complete identification, with the dead. The dead men whom King Orfeo sees are all those who have suffered violence, or who have run into danger of the fairies; the Elf Queen shows True Thomas five roads. Fairyland is not Heaven, nor Paradise, nor Purgatory, nor Hell, but it is a state subject to Satan, and bound to pay him a tribute. The witches' fairy familiars were all men who had died by violence, or been struck down at the dangerous hour of twilight; the fairies of Selena Moor were those who died before Christianity came to the land, recruited by individuals who had fallen into the fairies' power because of the infringement of some taboo. In the Irish tales the fairies and the dead dance together on certain days. But, though the connection is strong, it does not amount to identity. Even in the November

Night tale we have to remember the distinction between the good and bad fairies, which was as widely held at the popular distinction between black and white witches.

It is arguable, of course, that in primitive times all the dead were fairies, and that Christianity has removed most of them out of the fairy power. There are many fairy traits that might support this hypothesis, the green or white garments worn by the fairies — both of them colours of death — the small size of many of them — in stories of the separable soul the soul is generally regarded as small, or even tiny — the sepulchral mounds which they inhabit, the number of fairies who are supposed to be ghosts, and so on; but on the whole one might say that those of the Dead who inhabit Fairyland are people who have no right to be dead at all.